

Briefing Paper

Pacific Northwest Region – Regional Office

Cohesive Wildfire Strategy and Northern Blue Mountain Cohesive Strategy Pilot Project Meeting

Wildland fire burns across landscapes without regard for political jurisdictions, property lines, or land management units. This means that many stakeholders, with different authorities and resources, must work together closely. Whether it is implementation of a community wildfire protection plan or restoration of fire resilience to a watershed covering hundreds of thousands of acres, collaboration is the key.

Thus, the National Cohesive Wildfire Management Strategy (Cohesive Strategy) is an All-Hands, All-Lands approach to improve wildland fire management. It engages stakeholders from all levels of government, non-government organizations, and people with interest in wildland fire.

The Cohesive Strategy Vision is “To safely and effectively extinguish fire when needed; use fire where allowable; manage our natural resources; and as a nation, to live with wildland fire.”

The three principal goals of the Cohesive Strategy are:

- ❖ Restoring and Maintaining Resilient Landscapes;
- ❖ Creating Fire-Adapted Communities; and
- ❖ Effectively Responding to Wildfire Safely, Effectively, and Efficiently

At a recent interagency meeting in the Northeast Oregon community of La Grande, federal, state, and local leaders gathered to discuss the Blue Mountains Cohesive Strategy Pilot Project. The Blue Mountains Project is one of the three pilot projects in the West that will lead the way in developing the Cohesive Strategy nationally. This project encompasses 7.5 million acres in mixed ownership: 3.5 million acres on the Wallowa-Whitman and Umatilla National Forests, 2 million acres on private lands protected by the states of Oregon and Washington, and another 2 million acres protected by rural fire departments, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and others.

Multiple partners are working together to develop a model for forest resource and wildfire management with stakeholder engagement.

The visit included a look at the East Face Vegetation project, a component of the Blue Mountains pilot that seeks to restore resilient landscapes and across multiple ownerships. The project area encompasses approximately 44,000 acres of National Forest land, approximately 4,000 acres of state-owned lands, and nearly 33,000 acres of private lands with about 135 different owners on the east side of the Elkhorn Mountains between Anthony Lakes and Ladd Canyon. The Wallowa-Whitman Collaborative is currently working on this project with the other partners. The project focuses on the Cohesive Strategy goals of creating resilient landscapes and fire adaptive communities.



for the greatest good

A few thoughts from the representatives:

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Doug Decker, Oregon State Forester: “Oregon is bucking the status quo these days in a good way—from the federal Blues strategy, to the state’s support for increased pace and scale of restoration of federal lands, to the rise of collaboratives. The Cohesive Strategy needs to dovetail with those initiatives, reach for broader landscape change, and provide new levels of engagement for working with local jurisdictions and communities.”

Kent Connaughton, Pacific Northwest Regional Forester for the Forest Service: “The Cohesive Strategy provides a promising approach to reduce those wildland fire threats by treating fire-prone forests, preparing communities, and improving fire-fighting capabilities across the nation. I am enthusiastic about our possibilities, as success in the Cohesive Strategy is completely a consequence of what we choose to make of the opportunity.”

Jim Hubbard, US Forest Service Deputy Chief for State and Private Forestry: “The Blue Mountains project demonstrates the strength of commitment to working together for landscape improvements that achieve the goals of the Cohesive Wildfire Strategy. This approach represents a way of looking forward to reduce fire risk and create a more resilient forest. ”

Paul Hessburg, US Forest Service PNW station research landscape ecologist: “Many management recipes can lead to wildfire resilient landscapes, but some of these won’t feature socially, ecologically, and climatically resilient landscapes too. A successful way forward will focus attention on this more multi-dimensional landscape resilience—retuning fuel and vegetation patterns that support the fire regimes we want, while addressing sustainable human communities, climate-adapted vegetation patterns, reduced vulnerability to insect and pathogen disturbances, and restoring more sustainable habitat patterns for native fish and wildlife species. These are achievable goals that will prod us to develop restoration prescriptions for provincial and local landscapes alike.”

John Buckman, Northeast Oregon District Forester, Oregon Department of Forestry: “Wildland fire cooperators in the Northern Blue Mountain geo-region have practiced the Cohesive Strategy, especially the wildfire response portion, for many years before the concept became an initiative.”

Mark Jacques Pilot Project Manager, Oregon Department of Forestry: “This pilot project offers an opportunity to not only look at ways to improve and be more efficient and effective in our response to fire but to take a more holistic approach to wildland fire issues. We’re looking at opportunities to restore resiliency to our forest landscapes and working with communities to become better prepared and adapted to cope with and withstand wildfire.”

JB Brock, Union County Emergency Manager and Pilot Project Steering Committee Chair: “The local emphasis is vital to the success of a truly Cohesive Wildfire Strategy. The Cohesive Strategy is a plan for our future and the goals of the Strategy will come to fruition in our back yards and places we call home.”

Mike Hayward, Wallowa County Commissioner: “The stars seem to be aligning between the Cohesive Wildfire Strategy, Eastside Strategy, the initiatives by Oregon Governor Kitzhaber and the Oregon Legislature, along with the Forest Service, to really address the importance of resilient landscapes and the social and economic well-being of our communities.”